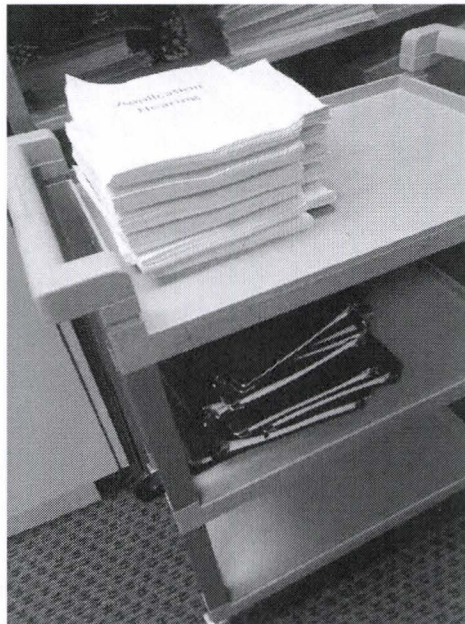


# Making Board Meetings More Secure and Efficient: Purging the Paper

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Molly F. Price

South Carolina Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation

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## **Introduction**

The Division of Professional and Occupational Licensing (POL) is an administrative unit within the Department of Labor, Licensing, and Regulation (LLR) that provides support to 40 professional and occupational regulatory boards that service nearly 400,000 licensees in South Carolina. The 40 licensing boards strive to protect the health, safety and wellbeing of the citizens of South Carolina by issuing licenses to qualified individuals and businesses (LLR, 2015).

The boards are composed of members who serve as a direct link between the profession and the consumers. Board members include licensed practitioners and members of the public who serve on the volunteer basis. Most are appointed by the Governor, some appointed with advice and consent of the Senate, and some of whom are elected. Most of the boards meet on the quarterly basis in meetings that are open to the public. Each board has the responsibility to evaluate the qualifications of license applicants, grants licenses to those that qualify, and establishes regulations that set ethical and technical competence standards for the professionals it licenses. The boards also take disciplinary action against licensees whose conduct fails to meet the accepted standards of the profession (LLR, 2015).

## **Problem Statement**

Each board at LLR is managed by a board administrator. The role of the board administrator is to provide support to the board members and to work with staff to manage the daily activities of the licensure process. The board administrator is also responsible for organizing and ensuring that the board meetings are run in an efficient manner. The number of boards each administrator has is determined by the number of licensees and the complexity of

the board. The fifteen board administrators at LLR manage anywhere from one to six boards each.

Board meetings can last anywhere from an hour to two days; depending on the complexity of the issues on the board's agenda. Many boards have multiple application and disciplinary hearings during meetings that can sometimes take a few hours each. All Boards manage meeting materials in different ways; however, all board members need documents to review during the meeting. Some boards use a fleet of dated laptops during the meetings to give board members the meeting materials in PDF format; however many of boards still print the meeting materials and put them into binders. Depending on the board, these packets can consist of hundreds of pieces of paper for each of the 4-12 board members. That's a lot of paper! In today's age, there has to be a more efficient way to conduct meetings without all of the paper; however, laptops are expensive and with at least two board meetings typically being held in the building on the daily basis that would be a lot of laptops.

Eliminating paper from board meetings would be an obvious cost and time saving measure over time; however, the bigger picture that aligns with the agency goal is security. Providing a social security card and photo ID is a requirement of licensure in South Carolina. This information is also requested multiple times within the application. LLR has taken many measures to ensure this information is secured electronically, but sometimes due to staff error this information is not properly redacted when it is put into board materials. By printing these materials, it is much harder to ensure this information does not land in the wrong hands.

In the past, many of the larger boards at LLR purchased laptops that they used for board meetings. Under a new administration this policy was done away with, which meant many of the



smaller boards had to borrow the laptops when they were available. This entire process was very frustrating to all involved. If there were no laptops available for a meeting, then the board would have to use paper handouts. For the past two years, staff members at LLR have been trying to figure out a new alternative to this method. To the dismay of some, in early 2015 the IT department collected all of the laptops and put them into a “pool” for all boards to check out for meetings. This seemed like a solution at the time, but as everyone soon learned, many of the laptops were very dated and tended not to work well during meetings. Due to the age of the laptops, many would die if they became unplugged from the power source. This was a major inconvenience to board members and did not help with the efficiency of the meetings. It was quickly determined that not only were there not enough laptops to go around, but only a few of them still worked well.

The first thought was that as an agency we needed to purchase new laptop computers for board members to use at meetings. However, was there a better alternative? Typically, board members only need to view PDF documents that are provided by staff for the meetings. They do not need to use Microsoft Office or access the LLR wifi network for meeting materials. After discussing the options with the Director of IT and comparing prices and functions of different devices; it was determined that computer tablets may be a better alternative for the board meetings. Not only would the tablets be an upfront cost saving measure for the agency over purchasing new laptops, but their capabilities may be more suited for the board meetings.

### **Selecting a Device**

Laptops tend to have a higher price point, because they tend to have capabilities that tablets do not. They have more storage, faster processors, and more of an ability to assist in

multitasking (Taylor, 2014). However, is any of that really needed for viewing PDF documents?

No. The most important aspects needed for the board meetings are battery life and security.

Tablets tend to have battery life that far exceeds that of a laptop. The average laptop lasts about 6 hours, according to manufacturers, and the average reported battery life for tablets is just under 10 hours (Taylor, 2014). It is a lot of work for staff to haul cords and heavy laptops to and from meetings. With a 10 hour battery life, the tablets would last nearly all day without cords.

Some tablets cost below \$100; however, most of those tablets would not be able to handle the large volume of PDF documents needed during meetings. Through the course of researching what would best suit the needs of our agency, it was also determined by the IT Director that the Apple iPad would not be a good fit for meetings, because it was not compatible with reviewing multi formatted large PDF documents. The IT Director concluded that a tablet with a Windows Operating System would be more compatible with the security features of LLR's network. Once it was narrowed down to what type of tablet device was needed, three options were reviewed in person. All were capable of doing what was needed for meetings, but one tablet stood out from the rest. The HP Elitebook Pro Revolve G3 was selected because it came with a keyboard docking station and in most aspects looked like a small laptop (see Appendix A). After considering the options, the Elitebook tablet seemed like the best fit for board members who may be turned away by using a touch screen tablet. By incorporating the keyboard as an option, this was less likely to be an issue. The HP Elitebook Pro Revolve G3 also has a 12 hour battery life, which exceeds the 10 hour average for tablets (Hewlett Packard, 2016).

Once a tablet was selected, the next steps were deciding how many tablets to order and how to pay for them. With an average of two board meetings being held in the building on a given day, it was estimated that we would need 50-60 tablets. However, with that being such a

high cost, the agency decided to start with 30 tablets. 30 tablets would help determine how high demand would be for using the devices and satisfaction with using them over the existing laptops. Since storing the new devices was also considered during this process, 30 was also the number that the HP Charging Cart would hold (see Appendix B).

The total price for purchasing the tablets was \$31,651.50 (30 x 1,055.05) plus \$2,299.00 for the charging station cart (see Appendix C). By comparison, the price quote for a basic laptop on state contract, before software, is \$1,284.24. With purchasing the tablets instead of the laptops, \$4,576.70 was saved. Since the tablets would be available for use by all 40 licensing boards, the Agency Director and IT Director decided to divide the total purchase price for the new tablets evenly among all of the licensing boards at the agency.

### **Implementation Plan**

After purchasing the devices, putting them to use among the licensing boards was the next step. The use of the new tablets for board meetings was not made a mandatory measure within the agency, but it was encouraged to those still currently using paper handouts for meetings.

As part of the implementation plan two goals were established:

- 1) Develop a method for checking out the devices
- 2) Train agency staff on how to set up and use the tablets for meetings

Once the tablets were delivered from HP and set up, the first step was determining how to get them out to those who needed to use them. Prior to the new tablets, the existing pool of laptops were stored in the office area of a staff person in IT. To check them out for meetings,



board staff would send an email requesting how many were needed and on what day. This check out method was sometimes overwhelming for an overworked IT staff. Since IT is a secure area not accessible to all LLR staff, keeping the laptops charged and ready to go was not always an easy task. Many of the laptops are different brands and require different charging cords, which was difficult to keep up with in a small cubical size area.

The lockable charging cart was ordered with the tablets, to try and ease some of the work with finding a place to charge and store the 30 new devices. However, the cart is large and not able to fit in a cubical work area. The most ideal solution would be to store the cart in a secure room with a badge reader; however, after a few days of searching it was determined that space is not available at this time. The tablets and cart are temporally being kept in an empty office in the secure IT area, with plans to look for a new space in the near future.

Since many of the laptops were different, the “check out” system kept track of who had what by using the long property ID number located on each device. Once again, this was a time consuming and inefficient process. The new charging cart for the tablets has numbered slots for each device. By marking each tablet with the correlating number (1-30), it is much easier to keep up with the tablets while they are checked out. When board staff reserves meeting room space at LLR, an online scheduling system is used. In the coming months, IT staff plans to develop a way to use the existing intranet system for reserving the tablets as well. This will eliminate keeping up with everything by email and only make available what is available for check out on each day. By doing it this way, when a board meeting room is reserved the tablets can be reserved at the same time.

After the tablets were set up with new software and a temporary solution for storage was addressed, everything was explained to the other board administrators at a meeting on September 22, 2015. At this meeting the check out process was explained and the use of the new tablets was encouraged. I also offered my assistance with setting up the tablets for board meetings and loading the meeting materials. The tablets were well received by those in attendance at the meeting.

On October 1, 2015, the 30 tablets were made available for check out for board meetings. Since 30 were purchased to start with, the use of the tablets was limited to only board members. LLR staff was asked to continue using the available laptops during meetings. Limiting the use of the tablets to only board members ensures that more boards get the opportunity to use them and provide feedback.

Prior to purchasing the tablets, the exact number of boards using paper handouts fluctuated depending on the availability of the laptops for checkout. However, since October 2015, there have been five licensing boards transition from the use of paper handouts at board meetings for the first time. All of these boards requested assistance with setting up the new tablets and making them user friendly for board members.

Each board has meetings that are unique to their licensing profession. What makes sense for a board on the business side of POL, may not work for a board on the medical side. Also, some boards have four board members and others have as many as sixteen. When training staff on setting up the new tablets, it is important to find a way to fit the needs of each board. By sitting down with staff from each board, we have worked together to put the documents in a user friendly format to help make the transition from paper documents easier for board members. As



with any new process, the transition has some trial and error and board member feedback has played an important role in preparing documents for future meetings.

### **Evaluation Method**

As the new tablets are used in the coming years, there will be process improvements needed along the way. To determine overall satisfaction with the tablets as of now, a brief email questionnaire was sent to fifteen board administrators on February 3, 2016. The following questions were asked:

- 1) Have you used the new tablets for a board meeting? If yes, which boards?
- 2) Did you previously use laptops for meetings?
- 3) Any feedback you would like to share?

Of the fifteen email recipients, ten responded and provided feedback about the new tablets. Of those that responded, only one administrator indicated that their board was still using paper handouts for meetings. Three administrators indicated that they used the tablets in place of paper handouts for the first time, four administrators used the new tablets in the place of laptops, and two administrators were still using the laptops for meetings.

Overall, there was high satisfaction with the use of the tablets. The three administrators who used the tablets in place of the paper handouts all provided positive feedback. They were appreciative of the time it saved on making copies and the ease of transitioning the board members to using the tablets in place of the paper handouts. The administrators who transitioned from using the laptops all provided feedback indicating their satisfaction with the take down and set up process. Since the tablets have the 12 hour battery life, most meetings do not require using

cords to keep them charged. Using the laptops often requires having all of the charging cords, extension cords, and surge protectors; so the tablets save a lot of time with set up and take down.

There were a few process improvement requests that were provided with question three of the email questionnaire. One of the boards had a meeting that ran into the evening and the battery life of the tablets ran low. Since there was nobody still available in IT after hours, they were unaware that there were additional cords they could use if needed. This problem has since been addressed. Another administrator reported that some board members wanted internet access on the tablets to search for related meeting materials. During the tablet set up process internet access was disabled on the devices, because it was an added security measure that was not seen needed. IT is working with that individual to see if they can come up with a solution. Another board preferred the larger size of the laptops to the tablets, because the screens were easier to read. Helping this board understand the touch screen zoom features may be beneficial in the future, but for now they have requested to use the laptops.

## **Summary**

As with any process improvement, there will be changes that need to be made along the way. It would be hard to calculate the money saved on copy paper at such a large agency; however, there is no price that can be put on data security. The new HP Elitebook Pro Revolve G3 tablets have helped our agency take the next step in ensuring board meetings are run in a more secure and efficient manner. LLR has a responsibility to the nearly 400,000 licensees in this state to make sure their personal information is protected and secure at all times. By never printing licensure applications and disciplinary documents for meetings, this information is far less likely to fall into the wrong hands. Ensuring board meeting efficiency is also an important

function of LLR. Board members volunteer their time for the good of their professions and should not be burdened by dated technology. The 30 tablets are becoming popular among the boards and continue to be utilized more and more each month. In the future, additional tablets will need to be purchased to phase out the dated laptops. Those wishing to use the laptops for now should be able to, but in the near future all boards should eliminate the use of paper handouts for meetings.



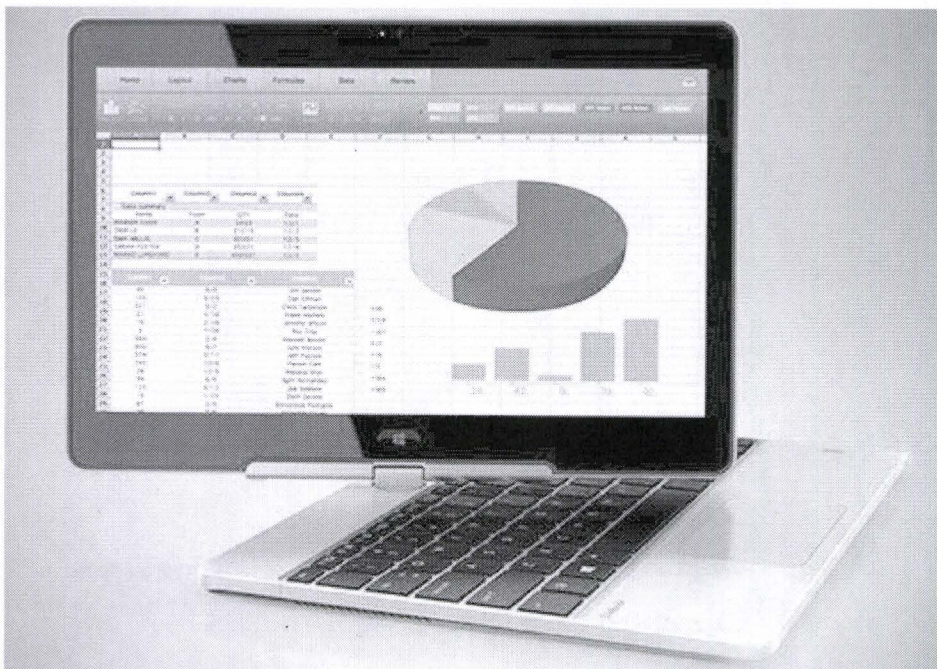
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LLR. (2015). *LLR Annual Report 2014-2015*. Retrieved February 3, 2016, from SC LLR: [www.llr.sc.gov/AboutUs/MediaCenter/annreport/report15.pdf](http://www.llr.sc.gov/AboutUs/MediaCenter/annreport/report15.pdf)

Taylor, B. (2014, September 25). *Laptop vs. tablets: how they compare for true productivity*. Retrieved January 9, 2016, from PCWorld: [www.pcworld.com/article/2602917/laptop-vs-tablets-how-they-compare-for-true-productivity.html](http://www.pcworld.com/article/2602917/laptop-vs-tablets-how-they-compare-for-true-productivity.html)

## Appendix A



## Appendix B





**PURCHASE ORDER**

Dept of Labor, Licensing &amp; Regulation

**Purchasing Office**

SC Dept of Labor, Licensing & Regulation  
Procurement Office  
110 Centerview Drive  
Columbia SC 29211

**Invoice To:**

SC Dept of Labor, Licensing & Regulation  
PO Box 11329  
Columbia SC 29211-1329

<b>Purchase Order:</b> [REDACTED] <b>Date Issued:</b> 08/31/2015 PO Number must appear on all Invoices and Delivery Slips.	<b>Payment Terms:</b> <b>within 30 Days 0.000 Percent Discount.</b>
<b>Vendor:</b> [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] USA	<b>Deliver To:</b> [REDACTED] Labor, Licensing and Regulation 110 Centerview Drive COLUMBIA SC 29210-8432 USA

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Created By: STEPHANIE DAVIS					
Authorized Signature					
If received electronically, printed name represents authorized signature for this document					

All Sales to the State of South Carolina (SC) are subject to the SC sales and use tax laws, unless such sales are otherwise exempt. The Contractor/Vendor will collect such tax as required.



